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ABSTRACT

This paper explores ideological factors that influenced child labor reform and the image of the child as depicted in romantic and sentimental literature of 19th century England and the United States. In both countries the image of the child and the view of the relative roles of the parent and the state in bearing responsibility for children underwent dramatic change during this era. A reluctance to interfere with paternal authority and a laissez-faire attitude towards industry created, during the last 20 to 30 years of the 19th century, a new attitude of "social responsibility" on the part of the public and the state towards children. Within the contexts of different cultural and historical particulars in the two countries, some common patterns do emerge. It appears that the groups that were disempowered by the sweeping social changes beginning in the late 1700's used the symbol of the child as an expression of their own increasingly marginal sensibilities. After the 1860's the needs of the two nations to maintain military and industrial strength also played a role in the change to a social welfare attitude toward children. Sections on each country are divided into three subsections: (1) early history of child labor reform, (2) sentimental and romantic images of children in literature, and (3) post-1860 reform movements. (IS)

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Ideological Themes in Movements for Child Labor Reform and in Images of Children in Literature in 19th Century England and America

Suzanne Kirschner

May 1983

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INTRODUCTION

This paper explores ideological factors which influenced both movements for child labor reform and the image of the child as depicted in Romantic and sentimental literature, during the nineteenth century. The two countries examined are England and the United States.

In both countries the image of the child and the view of the relative roles of the parent and the State in bearing responsibility for children underwent dramatic change during the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A reluctance to interfere with paternal authority and a laissez-faire attitude towards industry gave way, during the last 20 - 30 years of the nineteenth century, to a new attitude of "social responsibility" on the part of the public and the State towards its children.

Within the contexts of different cultural and historical particulars, some common patterns do emerge. It appears that the groups which felt (and were) disempowered -- spiritually, socially, politically and/or economically -- by the sweeping societal changes beginning in the late 1700s, used the symbol of the child as an expression of their own increasingly marginal sensibilities. In England this was true of the Romantic artists; in the U.S., of middle-class and educated women, and many of the Protestant clergy. The new reading habits of the bourgeoisie and the rise of mass media made more accessible and influential both literary images of the child and the publicity given to child labor by various reformers. After the 1860s, the perceived need to assimilate and socialize groups which potentially threatened traditional standards (workers in England, immigrants in America) and to ensure military and industrial strength vis-a-vis other nations, seems to have played a significant role in the changeover to a social-welfare attitude towards the nature, needs and nurturance of all children, other people's as well as one's own.

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NOTE: The paper on each country is divided into three sections:

I. Early history of child labor reform

II. Sentimental and Romantic images of children in literature

III. Post-1860 Reform Movements

Historical and chronological background material (especially in Section I.) is provided to furnish context for discussion of the ideological factors.

ENGLAND

I. Early History and Reformers

England was the first nation to industrialize; the second half of the eighteenth century saw the rise of mechanized production, particularly in the Midlands and the North. During the last quarter of the 1700s, Adam Smith published his laissez-faire doctrine, The Wealth of Nations (1778), and Malthus published Principles of Population (1798): industrial growth unhampered by State restrictions was the dominant political and economic ideology of this period.

Child labor was not a new thing; children had worked in agriculture and in the so-called 'cottage industries' at spinning wheels and weaving looms. As soon as factories and other industrial workplaces began to proliferate, children as young as six were employed there, also.

The earliest attention paid to problems created by the unrestricted use of child labor arose out of a concern for the morals and physical health of children who worked in these environments. The Sunday School Movement was started in 1780 by Robert Raikes, proprietor of the Glocester Journal. It grew out of a concern on the part of religious Christians, particularly Evangelicals that morals were declining among children who worked in factories. Efforts were made to instruct these children in reading and Church catechism on Sundays so that they could still work during the rest of the week. By the year 1833 it is estimated there were 1½ million children attending such schools.

Concern about the deleterious effects of factory labor on the physical well-being of children was first voiced by several Manchester physicians:

> In 1784 there had been a severe outbreak of the 'putrid fever' in the cotton mills at Ratcliffe, and so great was public anxiety that Dr. Percival, a Manchester physician, was requested to make an investigation....The children who were crowded together in the mills, he averred, were peculiarly liable to be affected by the fever, and once they had contracted it they rapidly affected others.[1]

Percival was especially critical of the close confinement, long hours and night labor. A Dr. Atkin of Manchester, in 1795, voiced similar reservations, as did a number of others at this time. Another early protest, which focused on the conditions under which chimney sweeps worked, was made in 1773 by Jonas Hanway, a philanthropist and the inventor of the unbrella. In 1788 an Act of Parliament forbade the apprenticing of boys as chimney sweeps before age eight and laid down certain other regulations -- but this act was a dead letter; stringent laws affecting the employment of chimney sweep boys were not made until the 1860s and 70s.

These were isolated and atypical voices, however. It appears that few people at the turn of the century were concerned with these issues. Furthermore, some historians argue that working conditions and treatment of children in factories during the early nineteenth century probably varied widely:

> The conflicting evidence relating to the effects of factory labour arose very largely from the great diversity of conditions. While it is true that factory labour at its worse was indescribably bad, and that some of the masters were indifferent to the comfort and health of their employees....such accusations were far from being applicable to factories and masters generally.[2]

At the start of the nineteenth century, there were virutally no restrictions placed on the conditions of labor in factories. The dominant doctrine of laissez-faire ensured that "by the year 1815 the old regulations and restrictions had been largely swept away and the gospel of freedom of contract and unlimited competition had

become almost universally accepted."[3] Thus, for at least the first half of the century, all the reform bills which were passed to limit child labor were not seen by the majority of Parliamentarians as being part of a general social movement, informed by a philosophy of social welfare and moving in the direction of progressively more encompassing reform. Rather, individual bills were considered to be appropriately piece-meal responses to specific, limited problems and abuses which had to be dealt with as they came to light:

> A distinction was drawn early in the nineteenth century between interference with industry as a matter of general policy and special action to prevent particular evils. (Viscount) Howick put this point clearly in the debates on the factory act of 1844. "There is an important distinction between restrictions imposed upon industry with the visionary hope of increasing the nation's wealth, or with the unjust design of taxing one class for the benefit of another, and those of which the aim is to guard against evils, moral or physical, which it is apprehended that the absence of such precautions might entail upon the people."[4]

Above all, regulations were not supposed to interfere significantly with the rights of parents. Significantly, the earliest bill attempting to regulate factory conditions for children, Peel's Health and Morals of Apprentices Act of 1802, was not applicable to children who had been sent to work by their parents, but only regulated conditions for children who were already wards of the State -- paupers from parish workhouses, who had been sent to labor in industry. Peel, a wealthy millowner responding to reports of ill health and stunted growth among these children, stipulated that apprentices were not to work more than 12 hours a day and were to be given some school instruction. However, the provisions of the bill were not reliably enforced.

There were, however, a few maverick "humanitarian" voices

lobbying for reform of labor conditions in general, and child labor in particular, during the first three decades of the nineteenth century; their early efforts were largely responsible for the passage of the first truly restrictive piece of child labor legislation, the 1833 Act to Regulate the Labour of Children and Young Persons in Mills and Factories (earlier bills, passed in 1819 and 1825, are generally considered to have been so restricted in scope and poorly enforced as to have been dead letters).

Interestingly, many of those who were abolitionists on the issue of slavery abroad, such as the middle-class Radicals, were not united with the humanitarians on the issue of labor legislation. This latter group -- mostly not workers themselves, and interested in the reform of child labor partly as a means of improving adult working conditions as well -- included among their leaders:

1. Robert Owen (1771-1858), the utopian Socialist. Owen was "a self-made manufacturer who...bought a cotton-mill in New Lanark, Scotland and turned (that) town into a model community organized on cooperative principles....Owen believed in man's natural goodness and was convinced that he was corrupted only by an improper environment." [5]
2. John Wood and John Fielden, both conscience-stricken factory owners. They supplied much of the money for agitation on behalf of reform.
3. Richard Oastler (1789-1861), a flamboyant Evangelical land agent from Yorkshire who in 1830 published a series of letters in the Leeds Mercury on "Yorkshire Slavery," violently denouncing the conditions of child labor and advocating a ten-hour work day for children (a very radical proposal at the time).
4. Finally, there was Michael Sadler (1780-1835), a Tory Evangelical member of the House of Commons who was known for his unfashionable opposition to the doctrine of laissez-faire. It was Sadler who

introduced a Ten Hours Bill into Parliament in December 1832. This proposal originally contained many "fantastic and extravagant" provisions, such as the prohibition of the employment of children under nine, a limit of ten hours a day for children between nine and eighteen, and the outlawing of all night work for those under twenty-one. Such a radical proposal "was allowed a second reading, but only on the understanding that the whole subject whould be examined bu a Select Committee. Sadler presided over this Committee, which sat on forty-three days between April and August and produced a great mass of evidence." from the testimony of many individuals including workers themselves [6] (later Commissions included child workers among their witnesses). As shall be seen below, the publicizing of this testimony had a significant effect on public concern about the poor in general and children in particular.

Sadler was defeated in the election of the same year, and advocates of the Bill needed a new leader to fight for its passage. They found him in Lord Ashley, later the Seventh Earl of Shaftsbury (1801-1885). Since 1832 was the year of the First Reform Bill (when the number of seats from different Parliamentary districts was re-distributed so that the Whigs -- the middle-class industrialists' party, not generally sympathetic to labor reform -- were given a new political advantage), "many of the country gentlemen [Tories] were glad of any opportunity of revenging themselves on the manufacturers who had clamored for the Reform of Parliament." [7] This may have been a motivation behind some of the Tories' support of labor reform, but it cannot completely account for the motivations of Shaftsbury, a Tory Evangelical who for the next forty years was the leading Parliamentary campaigner behind the many bills which were passed, and which (in spite of the laissez-faire

rationales described above) did have the cumulative effect of progressively restricting the conditions of child labor in a widening variety of types of workplaces (different kinds of factories, mines, chimneys, etc.). Ashley was no democrat -- he was hostile to trade unionism and against the 1867 Second Reform Bill which gave the vote to the working class (about which more later). His own unhappy if privileged childhood had been made more tolerable by an old family servant who converted him to Evangelicalism, and his lifelong attachment to this religion seems to have imbued him with a moral fervor and sense of noblesse oblige, which he invested in the cause of child labor reform.

Although the Bill of 1833 was nowhere near as restrictive as Sadler originally had proposed, it was important in several respects. First, it made stringent provisions for inspection of factories to ensure that the legislation was in fact being enforced, and it also made as a condition of emplyment that all factory children chould attend school (at this point, the rationale among reformers was that having the children in school part-time would keep them from being overworked. By the end of the century the rationale had become very different -- by the 1890s the ideology was that education had the first claim).

But from an ideological standpoint this act was of crucial importance because of the unprecedented publicity which the working conditions of the poor received on account of the publication of the Commission reports, along with other, similar documents published beginning around that time (during the course of the 1830s). This decade can be seen as a major turning point, marking the beginning of the rise of public concern and sentiment about the conditions of the urban poor in general and children in particular:

> Then come the great inquiries, by Parliamentary Committees or Royal Commissions, following the PoorLaw Commission of 1832....In a few years the public mind had been flooded with facts and figures bearing on every branch of national life....The Parliamentary Papers were first put on sale in 1835; division lists first published in 1836.... Copied or summarized in the Press, the Blue Books created a new attitude to affairs; they provided fresh topics for novelists and fresh themes for poets. [8]

Among the poets inspired by the disclosures of these Commissions was Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whose "Cry of the Children" was published in Blackwood's Magazine in 1843, inspired by the testimony of an assistant Commissioner on the employment of children in mines and factories. Here is its final verse:

> They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
> And their look is dread to see,
> For they mind you of their angels in high places,
> With their eyes turned on Deity.
> 'How long,' they say, 'how long, O cruel nation,
> Will you stand to move the world, on a child's heart, --
> Stifle down with a mailed heel its palpitation,
> And tread onward to your throne amid the mart?
> Our blood splashes upward, O gold-heaper,
> And your purple shows your path!
> But the child's sob inthe silence curses deeper
> Than the strong man in his wrath." [9]

But even more than the poetry, it was the social novel of the post-1830 era which promoted the image of the factory child as destitute, pathetic, vulnerable, in need of moral and political protection. While it is clear that these post-1830 novelists were strongly interested in and influenced by the burgeoning reports of slum and factory miseries, it is equally clear that their fascination with this image of the pathetic and vulnerable child has its antecedents in the preceding period of English letters -- that is, the Romantic movement in poetry -- and

that in order to more fully grasp the fascination and significance which this symbol of the child held for these later, more "socially-minded" prose-writers, it is useful to set it in the context of this earlier period.

II. The Development of the Romantic Image of the Child in English Letters

The child-centered novel of social and moral protest which emerged after about 1830 made use of an image of the child which had first come to prominence during the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first two decades of th nineteenth, in the work of Romantic poets such as Blake (1757-1827), Coleridge (1772-1834) and Wordsworth (1770-1850). According to Peter Coveney in his book, The Image of Childhood, until "the last decades of the eighteenth century" childhood had not been a major theme in English literature.[10] The emergence of the innocent, sensitive child as a central symbol in English Romantic poetry can be seen as an expression of protest on the part of these artists against a variety of social, political and intellectual currents.

The first leading figure of the Romantic movement is, of course, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778):

> Rousseau's great contribution was to give authoritative expression to the new sensibility and to direct its interest towards childhood as the period of life in which man most closely approximated the "state of Nature." His primary demand was...that the child is important in himself, and not as a diminuitive adult....[11]

The Romantic poets subsequently adopted the symbol of the innocent, sensitive, feeling child; their work can be seen as a revolt against, among other things, "the materialist, rationalist, perfectionist and essentilaly secular eighteenth century."[12] This was a revolt, in other words, against Newtonian mechanism,

Lockean associationism, and the thought of the philosophes of the *Enlightenment (excluding Rousseau, of course)* who were influenced by these earlier thinkers. Those who picked up on the Rousseauean sentiment of Original Innocence can also be seen as speaking out "in contradiction to the long Christian tradition of Original Sin".[13]

Coveney also suggests that the Romantic revolt was a reflection of a general sense of spiritual alienation felt in society as a result of the social and intellecutal uphevals and uncertainties provoked by the French and industrial revolutions. But perhaps most significant of all, in the special case of the artist himself, was his own changing role and status and the sense of spiritual alienation from his public which this engendered. According to both Coveney and Renato Poggioli (in his Weber-influenced Theory of the Avant-Garde), the artist had begun to sense the ending of the "more secure and happy times -- when the creator could count on a public, not large but faithful, attentive, compact and integral, to which he was bound by the sharing of identical presuppostisions, by the same system of social, aesthetic and ethical values."[14] Although, with the advent of bourgeois mass culture, the overall audience which read increased during the nineteenth century, the proportion of the public to which the serious artist felt he could address himself and be understood and appreciated by, appeared to be in steady decline. The Romantics' clustering together of Feeling, Nature and Innocence -- crystallized in the image of the child -- can be seen as an early expression of their beginning sense of spiritual alienation, the juxtaposition of these qualities, with which they identified, against an increasingly impersonal, exploitative and uncertain world:

> In this context of isolation, alienation, doubt and intellectual conflict, it is not difficult to see the attraction of the child as a literary

> theme. The child could serve as a symbol of the artist's dissatisfaction with the society which was in process of such harsh development about him. In a world given increasingly to utilitarian values and the Machine, the child could become the symbol of Nature set against the forces abroad in a society actively de-naturing humanity.[15]

In the poetry of William Blake, the child is portrayed as possesssing the highest spiritual Vision, having a link with the Divine. In Wordsworth's verse also, there is an implicit identification of the poet with the image of the child who is seen as endowed with a special gift of imagination: "In his poetry he asserted over and over again childhood's visionary quality and that in the child's consciousness lay powers of social and personal revitalization.... :

> A child, more than all other gifts
> That earth can offer to declining man,
> Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts.[16]

With the advent of the socially-oriented, child-centered novel, this early Romantic image of the child as a symbol of innocence and the life of the imagination underwent significant elaboration -- it became infused with more sentimentality, self-pity, even morbidity. This can be explained in part as a further development of the artist's increasing sense of alienation from his society -- a deepening sense of isolation and despair. But also of vital significance was the aforementioned growing awareness of and publicity given to the destitute condition of the poor in general and the working child in particular:

> The factor governing the literature of the child from the 1830s was the condition of children in society. The romantic period had asserted the innocence and frailty of the child. The victimized condition of the child in early Victorian England did not square with the image of childhood that had been created. The tension between innocence and experience, sounded initially by Blake, became the main motif of early and mid-Victorian literature of the child. The revelations of the successive Royal Commissions on industry, and particularly the findings of the Commis-

> sion on the Employment of Young Persons and Children of 1842, astounded and affronted the public conscience.[17]

In the work of Charles Dickens (1812-1870) Coveney notes both his extreme interest and involvement in what he felt to be the pressing social problems of his day, and the drift from the earlier Romantic child to a more sentimentalized, pathetic, even morbid image:

> Oliver Twist was the first novel in the language with its true centre of focus on a child....Written in 1831, the novel is an indignant commentary on the Poor Law amendment Act passed by the Whig Parliament four years before.[18]

In this and later novels, Dickens adopts the earlier Romantic assumption of the natural goodness of man and highlights the poignancy of how vulnerable this original innocence is in the face of the corrupting, warping environment. Oliver Twist is depicted as a poor, pale, thin nine-year-old who is helpless and isolated, vulnerable to "the environment of cruelty and corruption of the world of Fagin and Sikes." [19]

"After Dickens," says Coveney, "the original Romantic image of the child becomes an image of pathos, the image of innocence which dies...the image of a purity which must die before it is corrupted." [20] Many lesser writers who followed Dickens picked up on this image. (NOTE: In the section of this paper on the United States, there is a discussion of a similar image in mid-19th-century American literature, but in America it appears that it was promoted by middle-class women and Protestant clergymen, rather than serious artists).

Dickens was not the only "social novelist" of the mid-nineteenth century -- some of the most prominent others included Benjamin Disraeli (the future Prime Minister), Mrs. Elizabeth Gaskell, and the Rev. Charles Kingsley. Although these writers came from different religious and ideological backgrounds, all were expressing moral

indignation fired by the publicity about urban factory children and slum life, and all used the image of the pathetic and vulnerable child to give emotional poignancy and intensity to their protests, depicting the stark contrast between the Romantic image of purity and innocence and the squalid, impersonal environment by which the child was neglected, corrupted, and sometomes destroyed.

"In 1843 and 1844 Disraeli travelled extensively in the industrial areas" to collect information for his novel, Sybil. His characters in this book include Dandy Mick, one of the "factory adolescents, no more than children in age, but artificially aged and corrupted by their condition," and Devilsdust, "the quintessentially deprived industrial child".[21]

Mrs. Elizabeth Gaskell, the wife of a Unitarian minister, worked among the poor in the slums of Manchester. Her novel, Mary Barton (1848), depicts forlorn children as part of a general polemic against "a society in which the feelings of common human brotherhood are denied...setting selfish gain...above common good."[22] Hers is the moral protest of the Non-Conformist Christian.

From within the ranks of the official Church came the radical Anglican voice of Charles Kingsley (1819-1875), a minister whose Alton Locke (1850) similarly used the image of the pathetic child as a protest against the social and moral abuses and neglect of the poor. Kingsley was part of a small radical movement within the Anglican Church called the Christian Socialists, active from about 1848 through the 1850s. Along with Thomas Hughes, F.D. Maurice and others, Christian Socialists (not socialist in the Marxist sense) felt that the Church should play an active role in the reform of social abuses and inequalities of the day, especially vis-à-vis the conditions of laborers and the poor. They did not have a large impact on policies at that time but can be seen as a precursor to later,

socially-oriented ecclesiastical efforts which developed beginning in the late 1860s and 1870s both in Britain and the United States (the Social Gospel) and grew increasingly strong as the century drew to an end.

III. The Movement Towards State Responsibility and Control

The writings of the authors discussed in the previous section as well as those of many others, served to give much wider and more vivid publicity to a certain image of the child and to the sense that this image was being violated when the child was abandoned to the harsh and destructive environment of the mid-Victorian slum and factory.

Throughout the 1840s and 50s, owing to the efforts of Shaftesbury and his sympathizers, a number of bills were passed which widened the domian under which child labor was restricted. Furthermore, manufacturers were beginning to recognize that the regulation of working conditions was not automatically ruining their profits, and that in fact there might even be something to be gained from a less-overworked labor force.

After 1860, men who had been active Christian Socialists in their youth "came into power in the major universities. These men -- Matthew Arnold, the poet and critic, and John Ruskin, in fine arts, at Oxford," and Kingsley and Maurice at Cambridge, began to have influence through their associations at their universities, and thereby to promote the idea of the upper classes and the church taking social responsibility for the underprivileged. Concurrent with this (and perhaps owing to the influence of such men), "as early as the 1860s educated upper-class individuals started to live among workingmen in England just as in Russia under the influence of

Tolstoy....Men such as Edward Denison and Arnold Toynbee, with the support and approbation of their professors, began to comprehend and to voice some of the problems of the working-class neighborhoods."[23] These early forays into social service intensified and flourished in the 1880s and 1890s. Toynbee Hall, the first settlement house (and the model for the settlement houses founded in the U.S.A. in the late 1880s and 1890s) was founded in London in 1885; it was named for theupper-class social reformer mentioned above. The Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children was brought over from America (where it had been founded in 1874) to Liverpool in 1883 (it is interesting to note that both the U.S. and England had societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals before they had them for children). Such efforts and organizations mark a significant change in public attitudes about responsibility for child welfare, since even Shaftesbury, throughout his career, had been loath to interfere with parental authority in matters of what we today call child abuse.

It appears that, beginning in the late 1860s, certain key historical events exerted a powerful influence on popular and governmental attitudes towards the role of society and the State and their responsibility for the welfare and education of children:

First, the Second Reform Act of 1867 gave the franchise to the working classes "and there was a wide-spread feeling that the State could not afford to admit to a share in the government of the country people who were incapable, through lack of education, of using the newly acquired vote intelligently. 'We must educate our masters,' was the somewhat cynical remark of Mr. Robert Lowe, and in February of 1870 the Elementary Education Bill was introduced into Parliament."[24]

Contemporaneous with the widening of the franchise was the

Prussian victory in the Franco-Prussian war. The historian Elie Halevy points out:

> What was the particular German institution to which... the German victories of 1866 and 1870 were due? -- the answer is not in doubt. Long since, many years before the foundation of the Empire, Prussia had decided that the State must take possession of every child at its birth and follow him to the elementary school, the secondary school, and the university to form the fully developed man, the perfect servant of society; and her present supremacy was the reward merited by her excellent system of education. [25]

A similar example was set by the victory of the better-educated North over the South in the American Civil War. The overall effect of these historical events seems to have been a new sense of the critical importance of universal education to ensure a responsible voting public and a strong and capable military.

Additional motivation for universal education extending beyond the elementary years came by the 1880s when, Halevy points out, England's industrial supremecy had been called into serious question:

> More clearly than ever the English perceived the dangers which threatened their industrial supremacy....England seemed to have lost that gift of technical invention which till lately had been her boast....This decline, or at least stagnation, of British industrialism, was ascribed by some to hampering legislation and the progress of State Socialism, practised by the municipal bodies to the detriment of private enterprise. But the majority were agreed in laying the blame on an unsound theory of technical education, and called upon the State not to stand aloof any longer... [26]

Starting in the 1870s, with the advent of more sweeping educational reforms, there was an additional motivation for still more stringent child labor restrictions since, argues Halevy, "what indeed could be done so long as it was legal by the Factory Acts, which the

Statute of 1870 had not repealed, to employ children in the factories from the age of eleven, provided a few hours a day were set apart for education?" [27] (In order to ensure children attended school. it would be necessary to still further restrict the hours and conditons under which they could work, and to stringently enforce these restrictions).

Finally, with the advent of truly mass schooling in the 1870s, the need for State intervention in a variety of other welfare-related domains began to inform the ideology of the modern State:

> The education Acts of 1870 and 1876 swept into the new board schools children from all ranks of the working classes....Now, for the first time, could be seen, en masse, the results of the urbanisation of England expressed in terms of child health. Now it became clear that the great hope of elementary education, that it would assist in the prosperity of the nation by raising the ability of te working classes, would not be realised if children came to their lessons too under-nourished in body to be alert in mind. [28]

Labor, education and other welfare reforms have continued into the 20th century.

UNITED STATES

I. Early History

The first factories in the United States, textile factories in New England, made extensive use of child labor. In 1790, Samuel Slater, the "father of American manufacturing," manned his first factory entirely with children aged 7 through 12.[1] Child labor was less expensive than adult labor and brought down the wage-scale. By 1820, "according to the Digest of Manufacturers, children comprised 43 per cent of the labor force in the textile mills of Massachusetts, 47 per cent in Connecticut, and 55 per cent in Rhode Island."[2] Children helped to compensate for the labor shortages which were common in American industry until the mass immigrations of the late nineteenth century. The exception to the use of the labor of free children during the first half of the nineteenth century was, of course, the South: "the early introduction of negro slavery in the south meant that white children were not laborers as much as in Europe or the rest of America until later in the nineteenth century."[3] Once free-child labor was established there, however, there was much less sentiment to restrict it than there was in the rest of the country during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in part because there was not as much emphasis placed on the importance of education as in other parts of the country.

For in fact, the very first demands for restriction on the working conditions of the child arose as a result of (New England) Calvinism's emphasis on the necessity of education to ensure that children become moral and religious beings. Since the Bible was considered to be the principle means of contact with God, it was neceessary that children learn how to read in order to become good Christians. In addition to this religious element, there was also a widespread

belief dating from the early days of the Republic that universal education was necessary for the survival of a democratic form of government.

Hence, beginning with Connecticut in 1813, a law was passed requiring that all children who worked in factories be instructed in reading, writing and arithmetic. Similar legislation was passed in Massachusetts in 1836 and Rhode Island and Pennsylvania in 1859. This legislation was not aimed at restricting factory hours or conditions under which children worked. Rather, the aim was to supplement work with the education necessary to instill moral and religious standards.

It appears that the first organized groups to speak out against child labor in this country were labor organizations, first on the local level and later (starting in the 1860s, when national unions began to be formed) at the national one:

> Ever since the 1820s and 1830s labor organizations are known to have initiated the struggle to secure free public education for all children, to raise the compulsory school age, and to regulate the conditions under which young people should be allowed to work.... [5]

It was mainly these organizations which lobbied for the bills that were passed during the 1840s in mid-Atlantic and New England states to restrict child labor -- though as in the case of the early English legislation, these bills were by no means comprehensive, there were many loopholes, and in many cases manufacturers succeeded in evading or even securing repeal of these laws. One of the reasons labor organizations were so active in lobbying for child labor reform was their espousal of the democratic ideology of education for all; also there was their concern that the extensive use of child labor brought down the adult wage scale.

II. "The Feminization of American Culture"

A prominent ideological strain in nineteenth (and continuing into twentieth) century American culture is explored by Ann Douglas in her book, The Feminization of American Culture. Douglas's thesis is that a major change took place between 1820 and 1875 in the images and ideologies of the "feminine" sensibility as expressed in American popular literary culture. This transformation involved a sentimentalization and an idealization of soft, "saccharine" emotional and moral qualities of purity and innocence which came to be associated with religion and women. These qualities and sensibilities were often portrayed in the images of little girls in popular novels for women and children.

Douglas analyzes the character of the dying Little Eva in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), suggesting that it communicates an image of the "feminine" as impotent, decorative, pure and morally superior: "her sainthood is there to precipitate our nostalgia and our narcissism. We bestow on her the fondness that we reserve for the contemplation of our own softer emotions".[5]

According to Douglas, the proliferation of such "campy" images of soft and saintly women and little girls who were, practically speaking, powerless in the world of competitive and aggressive maschlinity, was the (dubious, in her estimation) accomplishment of Northeastern clergymen and middle-class literary women: "the minister and the lady were appointed by their society as the champions of sensibility."[6]

In other words, the American counterpart of the European "cult of the feelings" and its later, more sentimentalized incarnations, is seen by Douglas to have been perpetuated not by serious artists and social reformers but rather by two other groups whose roles and

as in England

status were transformed during the nineteenth century.

Douglas argues that "American Calvinists possessed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and lost in the nineteenth, a sternness, an intellectual rigor which our society then and since has been accustomed to identify as 'masculinity.'" Beginning with "disestablishment" (by 1833 no states had official churches attached to them any more), Northeastern ministers were "severed from their traditional sources of power"[7]. Hence, "between 1820 and 1875, the Protestant Church in this country was gradually transformed from a traditional institution which claimed with certain real justification to be a guide and leader to the American nation to an influential ad hoc organization which obtained its power largely by taking cues from the non-ecclesiastical culture on which it was dependent."[8] (The Social Gospel Movement of the 1870s and 80s, to be discussed in Part III, can be seen as another strategy taken by the Church to deal with its changed role).

Concurrent with clerical "emasculation" was the disempowerment of another group:

> By the middle of the nineteenth century the northeastern well-bred woman was 'disestablished' as surely as her clerical peers, although her disestablishment was hardly official....The middle class northern woman...formerly an important part of a communal production process under her direction, (her household) had become a place where her children stayed before they began to work and where her husband rested after the strain of labor. Once her family had looked to her quite literally to clothe and feed them; now they expected a complex blend of nurture and escape from her voluntary care.[9]

Deprived of her traditional role as a producer and integral part of the household, Douglas suggests that the middle-class woman became a sort of decorative "parasite," a "consumer" with no concrete power in the burgeoning industrial-bureaucratic society. As a consequence of their exclusion from the "masculine" arena, "liberal ministers

and literary women...were anxious to replace [their lost practical function] with emotional indispensability; they turned of necessity from the exercise of power to the exercise of [moral and spiritual] 'influence'." [10]

Douglas contends that the "cult of Motherhood" which persists to this day developed out of this attempt to assert such indispensability, exert such 'influence.' In addition to this sentimentalization of of the maternal role, function, and values, the above dynamic was also behind the creation, in women's novels, children's books, magazine articles, and other published works, of "feminized" characters -- often young women and little girls -- who were "exercises in euphemisms essential to the system of flattery which served as a rationale for the American woman's economic position....an icon of idealized if arrested femininity which forestalled the disappointments of maturation in a world uninterested at best in their intellectual and emotional adulthood." [11]

In addition to the case of Little Eva, who in her syrupy death scene "dispenses Christian wisdom and her own golden locks with profuse generosity," [12] Douglas analyzes stories such as that of little Ellen Montgomery, central character in The Wide Wide World, a long-lived (the writer of this paper actually read this book in her 1965 fifth grade class!) best-seller by Susan Warner first published in 1850. "The story...turns on the unwillingness of the old-fashioned little girl...to participate in the wide, wide world of masculine competition and business into which a cruel fate thrusts her." [13] At the same time as she is a symbol of "otherworldliness," however, Ellen is also, according to Douglas, a symbol of "expenditure" -- the American middle-class woman as consumer.

Another popular fictional little girl was Elsie Dinsmore (1868)

created by Martha Finley. Douglas says this story focuses on a "confrontation between feminine actions and man-made dictates....The fact remains that, even at age eight, the little girl knows best."[14]

If women writers and ministers often used sentimentalized images of mothers and children to symbolize the domain of influence with which they were becoming increasingly identified, the sentimentalized image of childhood may have been given a further push into the limelight by the general intensification of urban-industrialization following the Civil War (see Section III). Bernard Wishy detects in Louisa May Alcott's Little Women (1869) the theme of "the rejection of adulthood and mature responsibilities because of fears that the world's ways are too dangerous for innocent moral beings to confront." He suggests that books such as this one and Elsie Dinsmore announce themes which became prominent in the children's literature of the post-Civil War generation:

> ...the loveable, though erring child; the pure child whose good intentions are obscured or rejected by a corrupt world; the child whose spiritual or practical gifts can redeem the lives of adults but who sometimes senses his impotence....
> These children live in a more open and dangerous world that makes maturity perilous....
> Above all, although the notion endured that only the pure and innocent could save the world, it was increasingly feared that the world might be too much for the pure and innocent[15]

III. Post-Civil War to the Progressive Era

The Post-Civil War period in the United States was one of unprecedented industrial growth. By 1890 the U.S. was the leading industrial nation in the world. The 1870s and 1880s are often called the gilded age because of the materialistic and secular character of the social and cultural life during that time.

Labor Unions, some national by now, continued to lobby for child labor reforms : the American Federation of Labor, for example, adopted a resolution in 1881, at its first annual convention, advocating raising the minimum age of employment to fourteen. Beginning in the 1870s, various political parties began to put forth national platforms condemning child labor -- including the Prohibition Party, the Working Men's Party, the Greenback Party, and others. Following the depression of 1873 there sprang up radical parties such as the Socialists which likewise vehemently condemned child labor. In 1883 there was a U.S. Senate probe of capital-labor relations which publicized the working conditions of children. By 1892 the Democratic party had a plank in favor of prohibiting the employment in factories of children under fifteen years of age.

Another source of publicity which aroused public interest was the 1870 census, which was the first to list the number of child workers in America. The 1880 sensus noted that 1/6 of all 10-15 year-olds were employed (over one million); by 1900 the figure was over 1.7 million.

An important social movement after 1870, a reflection of and response to the changing role of the Protestant Church in America, was the Social Gospel Movement. This was somewhat similar to the earlier Christian Socialist effort in England, but seems to have had a much more immediate and wider impact. It appears to have been an

attempt on the part of certain Protestant clergymen (and, eventually, the clergy of other faiths as well) to promote a "social conscience" on the part of the churches, to take an active role in remedying the increasingly apparent and widespread vicissitudes of urban-industrial growth. It was also an attempt to revitalize the churches, and thereby to reassert influence over many members of the urban middle classes who had fallen away during the secular , materialistic gilded age (during which time the writings of Darwin and Marx also threatened the primacy of religious doctrines). Prominent among the conditions against which this movement protested was child labor: In his 1875 book, The Social Law of God , the Episcopalian Reverend Edward A. Washburn of New York "spoke of war, indifference to life, vice, tenements, unsafe factories, and child labor as 'the murders that society does not love to know'." [16]

Along with the many Social Gospel tracts and novels, there appeared in the 1870s and 1880s books such as Charles Loring Brace's The Dangerous Classes of New York (1872; Brace founded the Children's Aid Society in that City about 1854; it was an early "child-saving"effort on the part of the upper- and middle-classes) and Henry George's Progress and Poverty (1879); these writings depicted child labor as part of a generally corrupt and inhumane social system in need of overarching reform. Since more people than ever were reading ("from 1850 on there was an enormous increase in the production of 'literature for the masses'," much of which dealt with the problems of urban life [17]), these and similar popular works had an influence on public awareness and sentiments about urban conditions and children. The number of mass circulation magazines went from 700 in 1865 to 3300 by 1885; from 1880 to 1900 the number of daily newspapers doubled and circulation went up still faster.[18] See below for more

on the influence of Muckraking reporters during the Progressive Era).

Finally -- and this appears to have been a major factor behind the push after 1885 for social services and child welfare reform in America -- there was the wave of mass immigration from southern and eastern Europe into American cities. In 1880 the percentage of immigrants who were Italians, Slavs, Magyars and Jews was 18.3%; in the 1890s it jumped to 52%; and in the first decade of the 1900s it was 72%.[19] The visibly stressful conditions under which they lived and worked, and also the rapidly rising urban crime rate (the number of murders per million jumped from 25 in 1881 to 107 in 1898)[20] and various other perceived threats to middle-class norms and values contributed to the emergence of the Social Justice Movement, an attempt on the part of "lawyers, intellectuals, ministers and upper-class women"[21] to ameliorate the social and working environments of the poor. The profession of social work came out of this movement, whose leaders started settlement houses, publicized and lobbied for reform of working conditions (especially of children), and generally were committed to the belief that a change in the social and community environment of the poor would produce more "responsible," "respectable," and accomplished citizens. In order to legitimate their demands for state and federal reform, they often had to gather data in the slums and factories and "to some extent, surveys and other types of empirical studies of the social environment developed because hard-headed legislators demanded proof that working conditions were indeed affecting women and children adversely."[22]

One theory about the rise of social work is that the traditional professions of the law, teaching, and the ministry were losing prestige to the business world. There was a group of young people with high-level educations who saw in social service a way to influence society

and simultaneously to gain prestige.. This was especially important in the case of the women, since they comprised the vast majority of settlement workers ("Seventy percent of the residents of the 250 most important settlement houses were women....These were the first generation of women for whom higher education became a reality. Often ardent feminists....(they) were determined not only to demonstrate their intellectual productions were worthy, but they were impelled to justify their own existence by making themselves useful in the world."[23]). Among the most famous women involved in the Social Justice Movement were Jane Addams, who founded Hull House in Chicago after visiting Toynbee Hall in London in 1888; Lillian Wald , founder of the Henry Street Settlement in New York; and Florence Kelley, a Socialist lawyer who was the driving force behind the National Consumers' League, an organization which campaigned vigorously in favor of labor reform during the 1890s and argued that the government must intervene when parents insisted on sending their children to work and depriving them of education.

The Social Justice Movement is one of the early movements associated with the Progressive Era, a period in American History the roots of which can be traced back to the 1870s, though its dates are generally given as 1900-1920. It was "primarily a middle-class movement,"[24] characterized by a tone of moral indignation over social and moral conditions such as those against which the Social Christians and social workers had been protesting. By the 1890s social scientists were challenging social Darwinism, classical economics and rugged individualism. Also, as has been suggested, the "protection of the weak" had become a way to resocialize immigrant children and other disadvantged groups in accord with middle-class values and safety. During this period the mass media became even more influential, and the heyday of the "cheap magazine," during the

1890s and 1900s, provided exposure for the sensationalistic, social-reform-oriented writings of the Muckrakers, a group of journalists whose investigations of social and economic corruption included lurid descriptions of child labor practices. Fictional polemics were also being written: John Spargo, a leader of the Socialist party, wrote The Bitter Cry of the Children in 1906, "a moving plea for child labor reform and a damning indictment of a system that consumed its young."[25]

In 1900 there were at least 1.7 million working children and wide variation in the types of child labor laws on the books in different states. But the ideological climate described above was a fertile one for organizations pushing for child labor reform. The Progressive atmosphere of moral indignation condensed in the form of organizations like the National Child Labor Committee. a private group founded in 1904 and led by prominent social workers, Social Christians (and other clergy), and some rich businessmen; among its early leaders was Felix Adler, founder of the Society for Ethical Culture and a central figure in the early Child Study Movement. That the public and the government were increasingly coming to view "child-protection" issues as important is also evident in the founding in 1912 of the United States Children's Bureau, an agency of the Department of Labor intended to further publicize these issues.

On the next page is printed the "Declaration of Dependence by the Children of America in Mines and Factories and Workshops Assembled" -- written by a member of the NCLC in 1913, it expresses the ideology of children's needs and rights inherent in these appeals for reform:

Declaration of Dependence by the Children of America in Mines and Factories and Workshops Assembled

WHEREAS, We, Children of America, are declared to have been born free and equal, and

WHEREAS, We are yet in bondage in this land of the free; are forced to toil the long day or the long night, with no control over the conditions of labor, as to health or safety or hours or wages, and with no right to the rewards of our service, therefore be it

RESOLVED, I—That childhood is endowed with certain inherent and inalienable rights, among which are freedom from toil for daily bread; the right to play and to dream; the right to the normal sleep of the night season; the right to an education, that we may have equality of opportunity for developing all that there is in us of mind and heart.

RESOLVED, II—That we declare ourselves to be helpless and dependent; that we are and of right ought to be dependent, and that we hereby present the appeal of our helplessness that we may be protected in the enjoyment of the rights of childhood.

RESOLVED, III—That we demand the restoration of our rights by the abolition of child labor in America.

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ALEXANDER J. MCKELWAY, 1913

Footnotes

ENGLAND

1. Maurice Thomas, Young People in Industry (London, 1945), p. 25.
2. Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt, Children in English Society (London, 1973), p. 410.
3. Thomas, pp. 9 - 10.
4. Sir Llewellyn Woodward, The Age of Reform (Oxford, 1962), p. 16.
5. Charles Breunig, The Age of Revolution and Reaction (New York, 1970), p. 221.
6. J.L. and Barbara Hammond, Lord Shaftesbury (New York, 1953), pp. 15-16.
7. Ibid., p. 24.
8. G.M. Young, Victorian England (London, 1953), p. 33.
9. Elizabeth Browning, Complete Poetical Works (Boston, 1900), p. 158.
10. Peter Coveney, The Image of Childhood (Middlesex, 1967), p. 29.
11. Ibid., pp. 42-43.
12. Ibid., p. 40.
13. " , p. 33.
14. Renato Poggioli, The Theory of the Avant Garde (Cambridge, 1981), p. 116.
15. Coveney, p. 31.
16. Coveney, p. 83.
17. Ibid., pp. 92-93.
18. " , p. 127.
19. " , p. 129.
20. " , p. 192.
21. " , pp. 94-95.
22. " , p. 22.
23. Murray and Adeline Levine, Social History of the Helping Services (New York, 1970), p. 75.
24. Thomas, p. 106.
25. Elie Halevy, Imperialism and the Rise of Labour (London, 1951), p. 143.

continued --

26. Ibid., p. 157.

27. Ibid., p. 144.

28. Pinchbeck and Hewitt, p. 632.

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1. Walter I. Trattner, Crusade for the Children (Chicago, 1970), p. 26.

2. Ibid., p. 27.

3. " , p. 25.

4. Katharine DuPre Lumpkin and Dorothy Wolff Douglas, Child Workers in America, p. 247.

5. Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (New York, 1977), p. 4.

6. Ibid., p. 12.

7. " , p. 23.

8. " , p. 24.

9. " , p. 48.

10. " , p.

11. " , p. 62.

12. " , p. 3.

13. " , p.

14. " , p. 72.

15. Bernard Wishy, The Child and the Republic (Philadelphia, 1968), p. 93.

16. Charles Howard Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel... (New Haven, 1940), p. 34.

17. Merle Curti et al., A History of American Civilization (New York, 1953), p. 413.

18. Ibid., pp. 413-414.

19. Arthur S. Link and William B. Catton, American Epoch (1963). p. 5.

20. Curti, p. 403.

21. Levine and Levine, p. 27.

22. Ibid., p. 27.

23. " , pp. 78-79.

24. Link and Catton, p. 51.
25. " , p. 64.
26. Trattner, p. 7.

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